

BEFORE YOU READ

The short story “The Sniper” is set in Dublin, Ireland, in the 1920s, during a time of bitter civil war. The Republicans, on one side, wanted all of Ireland to become a republic, totally free from British rule. The Free Staters, on the other side, were willing to allow continued English rule over six counties in the northern part of Ireland. The poem “Thoughts of Hanoi” is set in the Vietnam of the 1960s, when armies from North Vietnam and South Vietnam fought to control the entire country.

LITERARY FOCUS: THEME AND CONFLICT

A **theme** is what a story reveals about life or human nature. One way to discover a theme is to pay close attention to conflict faced by the main character in a short story or by the speaker in a poem. A **conflict** is a struggle between opposing forces. The conflict can be **external**—between two characters or between a character and an outside force such as society or nature—or **internal**—between opposing desires or needs in a character’s own mind or heart. In stories and poems about war, the theme may be revealed by how the conflict affects the characters and what they discover as the story or poem ends.

- As you read “The Sniper,” ask yourself what the main character has discovered at the end of the story.
- As you read “Thoughts of Hanoi,” ask yourself what the speaker is saying to the person he addresses as “Brother.”

READING SKILLS: MAKING PREDICTIONS

**Predictions** are guesses about what will happen. Active readers always make predictions as they read a story. They base their predictions on details in the story and on their own experience.

Before you read “The Sniper,” fill in the Predictions Chart below using what you know from the title and from your knowledge of the subject of war. Then, make one or two predictions about what might happen in the story. The first row has been filled in as an example.

| What You Know                                 | Predictions   |
|---|---|
| Snipers have guns. In war, people get killed. | One or more people will get killed, maybe including the sniper. |
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**Reading Standard 1.1**  
Identify and use the literal and figurative meanings of words and understand word derivations.

**Reading Standard 3.3 (Grade 8 Review)**  
Compare and contrast motivations and reactions of literary characters from different historical eras confronting similar situations or conflicts.

**Reading Standard 3.5**  
Compare works that express a universal theme and provide evidence to support the ideas expressed in each work.

## VOCABULARY DEVELOPMENT

### PREVIEW SELECTION VOCABULARY

The following words appear in "The Sniper." Before you read the story, become familiar with them.

**beleaguered** (bē-lē'gərd) v. used as adj.: surrounded and under attack.

*The bullets whizzed by, trapping the **beleaguered** soldier.*

**ascetic** (ə-set'ik) adj.: severe; also, self-disciplined.

*The soldier's **ascetic** lifestyle had prepared him for the hardships of war.*

**fanatic** (fə-nat'ik) n.: person whose extreme devotion to a cause is excessive or unreasonable.

*Only a **fanatic** would enlist in an army that faced certain defeat.*

**ruse** (rōōz) n.: trick.

*Using a clever **ruse**, the soldiers fooled their enemy.*

**silhouetted** (sil'ə-wet'id) v. used as adj.: outlined.

*The face, **silhouetted** against the wall at sunset, was a living shadow.*

**remorse** (ri-môrs') n.: deep guilt.

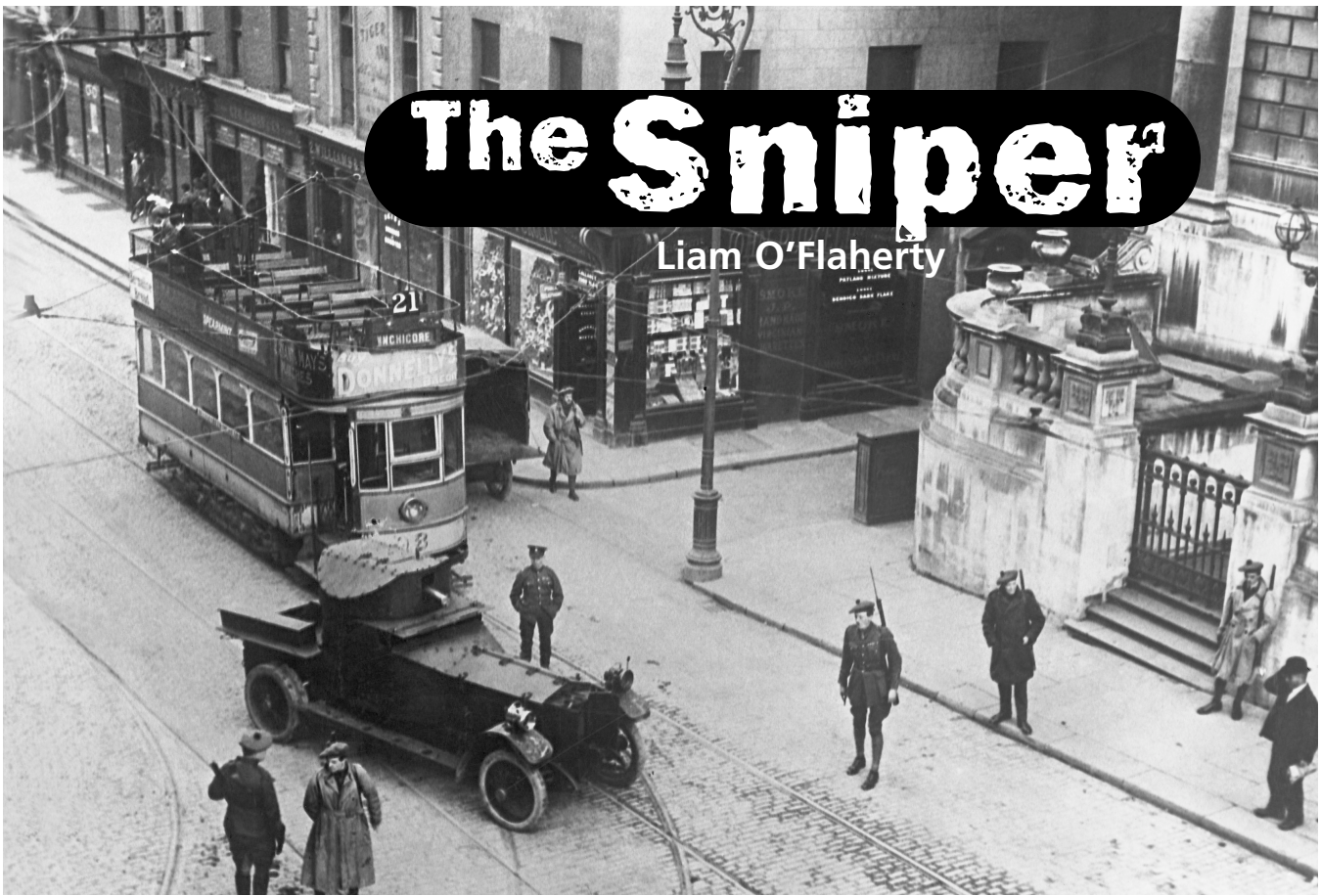
*Did the killer feel **remorse** for his actions?*

### WORD HISTORIES

Like people, many words have fascinating pasts. The story behind the word *silhouetted* (see line 96 of "The Sniper") is especially interesting.

By 1759, France was on the brink of bankruptcy. Madame de Pompadour convinced King Louis XV to replace the head of the treasury with a friend of hers, Etienne de Silhouette. He jumped right into the job and began preaching thrift and economy. Meanwhile, the old art form of tracing and cutting out the outline of shadows had become popular again. Because these profiles were the cheapest way to reproduce a person's likeness, they were mocked as being à la *Silhouette*. Etienne de Silhouette lost his job within the year, but his name lives on in the art of creating shadow outlines.

As you read, keep track of words whose histories you'd like to track down.



### CLARIFY

A *sniper* is a person who shoots from a hidden position.

### VOCABULARY

**beleaguered** (bē-lē'gərd) *v.*  
used as *adj.*: surrounded and under attack.

**ascetic** (ə-set'ik) *adj.*: severe;  
also, self-disciplined.

**fanatic** (fə-nat'ik) *n.*: person  
whose extreme devotion to a  
cause is excessive or un-  
reasonable.

### IDENTIFY

Pause at line 8. Which two  
sides are warring? Circle that  
information.

The long June twilight faded into night. Dublin lay enveloped in darkness but for the dim light of the moon that shone through fleecy clouds, casting a pale light as of approaching dawn over the streets and the dark waters of the Liffey.<sup>1</sup> Around the **beleaguered** Four Courts<sup>2</sup> the heavy guns roared. Here and there through the city, machine guns and rifles broke the silence of the night, spasmodically, like dogs barking on lone farms. Republicans and Free Staters were waging civil war.

10 On a rooftop near O'Connell Bridge, a Republican sniper lay watching. Beside him lay his rifle and over his shoulders was slung a pair of field glasses. His face was the face of a student, thin and **ascetic**, but his eyes had the cold gleam of the **fanatic**. They were deep and thoughtful, the eyes of a man who is used to looking at death.

1. **Liffey**: river that runs through Dublin.
2. **Four Courts**: government buildings in Dublin.

"The Sniper" from *The Martyr* by Liam O'Flaherty. Copyright © 1933 by Liam O'Flaherty as printed in the original volume. Reprinted by permission of The Peters Fraser Dunlop Group Limited on behalf of the Estate of Liam O'Flaherty.

He was eating a sandwich hungrily. He had eaten nothing since morning. He had been too excited to eat. He finished the sandwich, and, taking a flask of whiskey from his pocket, he took a short draft. Then he returned the flask to his pocket. He paused for a moment, considering whether he should risk a  
20 smoke. It was dangerous. The flash might be seen in the darkness, and there were enemies watching. He decided to take the risk.

Placing a cigarette between his lips, he struck a match, inhaled the smoke hurriedly, and put out the light. Almost immediately, a bullet flattened itself against the parapet<sup>3</sup> of the roof. The sniper took another whiff and put out the cigarette. Then he swore softly and crawled away to the left.

Cautiously he raised himself and peered over the parapet. There was a flash and a bullet whizzed over his head. He  
30 dropped immediately. He had seen the flash. It came from the opposite side of the street.

He rolled over the roof to a chimney stack in the rear and slowly drew himself up behind it, until his eyes were level with the top of the parapet. There was nothing to be seen—just the dim outline of the opposite housetop against the blue sky. His enemy was under cover.

Just then an armored car came across the bridge and advanced slowly up the street. It stopped on the opposite side of the street, fifty yards ahead. The sniper could hear the dull pant-  
40 ing of the motor. His heart beat faster. It was an enemy car. He wanted to fire, but he knew it was useless. His bullets would never pierce the steel that covered the gray monster.

Then round the corner of a side street came an old woman, her head covered by a tattered shawl. She began to talk to the man in the turret<sup>4</sup> of the car. She was pointing to the roof where the sniper lay. An informer.

3. **parapet** (par'ə-pet') *n.*: low wall or railing.

4. **turret** (tur'it) *n.*: low, usually revolving structure for guns on a tank or warship.

### PREDICT

What do you **predict** the sniper will do, based on the description in lines 9–14?

### CONFLICT

Pause at line 31. Does the sniper face an **external conflict** (a struggle against another person, society, or nature) or an **internal conflict** (a struggle within himself)?

### PREDICT

Re-read lines 43–46. Circle the word that identifies the woman's role in the war. Underline the sentences that describe her actions. What do you **predict** will happen to the woman?



### INFER

Pause at line 51. Why does the sniper kill the man in the turret?

### FLUENCY

Read the boxed passage aloud three times. Improve the speed and the smoothness of your delivery each time you read.

### THEME

Re-read this page. Think about what has happened. What do you learn about the effects of war?

The turret opened. A man's head and shoulders appeared, looking toward the sniper. The sniper raised his rifle and fired. The head fell heavily on the turret wall. The woman darted  
50 toward the side street. The sniper fired again. The woman whirled round and fell with a shriek into the gutter.

Suddenly from the opposite roof a shot rang out and the sniper dropped his rifle with a curse. The rifle clattered to the roof. The sniper thought the noise would wake the dead. He stooped to pick the rifle up. He couldn't lift it. His forearm was dead. "I'm hit," he muttered.

Dropping flat onto the roof, he crawled back to the parapet. With his left hand he felt the injured right forearm. The blood was oozing through the sleeve of his coat. There was no  
60 pain—just a deadened sensation, as if the arm had been cut off.

Quickly he drew his knife from his pocket, opened it on the breastwork<sup>5</sup> of the parapet, and ripped open the sleeve. There was a small hole where the bullet had entered. On the other side there was no hole. The bullet had lodged in the bone. It must have fractured it. He bent the arm below the wound. The arm bent back easily. He ground his teeth to overcome the pain.

Then taking out his field dressing, he ripped open the packet with his knife. He broke the neck of the iodine bottle and let the bitter fluid drip into the wound. A paroxysm<sup>6</sup> of pain swept  
70 through him. He placed the cotton wadding over the wound and wrapped the dressing over it. He tied the ends with his teeth.

Then he lay still against the parapet, and, closing his eyes, he made an effort of will to overcome the pain.

In the street beneath all was still. The armored car had retired speedily over the bridge, with the machine gunner's head hanging lifeless over the turret. The woman's corpse lay still in the gutter.

The sniper lay still for a long time nursing his wounded arm and planning escape. Morning must not find him wounded

5. **breastwork** *n.*: low wall put up as a military defense.

6. **paroxysm** (par'ək-siz'əm) *n.*: sudden attack; fit.

80 on the roof. The enemy on the opposite roof covered his escape. He must kill that enemy and he could not use his rifle. He had only a revolver to do it. Then he thought of a plan.

Taking off his cap, he placed it over the muzzle of his rifle. Then he pushed the rifle slowly upward over the parapet, until the cap was visible from the opposite side of the street. Almost immediately there was a report,<sup>7</sup> and a bullet pierced the center of the cap. The sniper slanted the rifle forward. The cap slipped down into the street. Then, catching the rifle in the middle, the sniper dropped his left hand over the roof and let it hang, life-  
90 lessly. After a few moments he let the rifle drop to the street. Then he sank to the roof, dragging his hand with him.

Crawling quickly to the left, he peered up at the corner of the roof. His **ruse** had succeeded. The other sniper, seeing the cap and rifle fall, thought that he had killed his man. He was now standing before a row of chimney pots, looking across, with his head clearly **silhouetted** against the western sky.

The Republican sniper smiled and lifted his revolver above the edge of the parapet. The distance was about fifty yards—a hard shot in the dim light, and his right arm was paining him  
100 like a thousand devils. He took a steady aim. His hand trembled with eagerness. Pressing his lips together, he took a deep breath through his nostrils and fired. He was almost deafened with the report and his arm shook with the recoil.

Then when the smoke cleared he peered across and uttered a cry of joy. His enemy had been hit. He was reeling over the parapet in his death agony. He struggled to keep his feet, but he was slowly falling forward, as if in a dream. The rifle fell from his grasp, hit the parapet, fell over, bounded off the pole of a barber's shop beneath, and then clattered on the pavement.

110 Then the dying man on the roof crumpled up and fell forward. The body turned over and over in space and hit the ground with a dull thud. Then it lay still.

7. **report** (ri·pôrt') *n.*: loud noise; in this case, from a gunshot.

### PREDICT

Pause at line 82. What do you think the sniper's plan will be?

### CHARACTER

Re-read lines 83–96. Underline the sentences that describe the sniper's actions.

### VOCABULARY

**ruse** (rōōz) *n.*: trick.

**silhouetted** (sil'ə-wet'id) *v.* used as *adj.*: outlined.

### INFER

Underline the words in line 105 that reveal the sniper's feelings. What has the sniper done that causes these feelings?

### VOCABULARY

**remorse** (ri-môrs') *n.*: deep guilt.

### THEME

Re-read lines 113–119. How have the sniper's feelings about war changed?

### PREDICT

Pause at line 140. Who do you predict the sniper's enemy will be?

### THEME

What **theme** does the story's ending reveal? State your answer as a sentence.

The sniper looked at his enemy falling and he shuddered. The lust of battle died in him. He became bitten by **remorse**. The sweat stood out in beads on his forehead. Weakened by his wound and the long summer day of fasting and watching on the roof, he revolted from the sight of the shattered mass of his dead enemy. His teeth chattered, he began to gibber to himself, cursing the war, cursing himself, cursing everybody.

120 He looked at the smoking revolver in his hand, and with an oath he hurled it to the roof at his feet. The revolver went off with the concussion and the bullet whizzed past the sniper's head. He was frightened back to his senses by the shock. His nerves steadied. The cloud of fear scattered from his mind and he laughed.

Taking the whiskey flask from his pocket, he emptied it at a draft. He felt reckless under the influence of the spirit. He decided to leave the roof now and look for his company commander, to report. Everywhere around was quiet. There was not  
130 much danger in going through the streets. He picked up his revolver and put it in his pocket. Then he crawled down through the skylight to the house underneath.

When the sniper reached the laneway on the street level, he felt a sudden curiosity as to the identity of the enemy sniper whom he had killed. He decided that he was a good shot, whoever he was. He wondered did he know him. Perhaps he had been in his own company before the split in the army. He decided to risk going over to have a look at him. He peered around the corner into O'Connell Street. In the upper part of the street  
140 there was heavy firing, but around here all was quiet.

The sniper darted across the street. A machine gun tore up the ground around him with a hail of bullets, but he escaped. He threw himself face downward beside the corpse. The machine gun stopped.

Then the sniper turned over the dead body and looked into his brother's face.

# Thoughts of Hanoi

Nguyen Thi Vinh

translated by Nguyen Ngoc Bich with  
Burton Raffel and W. S. Merwin



The night is deep and chill  
as in early autumn. Pitchblack,  
it thickens after each lightning flash.

I dream of Hanoi:

- 5 Co-ngu<sup>1</sup> Road  
ten years of separation  
the way back sliced by a frontier of hatred.

I want to bury the past  
to burn the future

- 10 still I yearn  
still I fear  
those endless nights  
waiting for dawn.

Brother,

- 15 how is Hang Dao<sup>2</sup> now?  
How is Ngoc Son<sup>3</sup> temple?  
Do the trains still run  
each day from Hanoi

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1. Co-ngu (kō'nōō')
  2. Hang Dao (hăŋ'dou')
  3. Ngoc Son (nōk'sōn')

"Thoughts of Hanoi" by Nguyen Thi Vinh from *A Thousand Years of Vietnamese Poetry*, translated by Nguyen Ngoc Bich. Copyright © 1974 by The Asia Society. Reprinted by permission of the publisher.

## IDENTIFY

Underline the words in lines 4–7 that tell how long it has been since the speaker was last in Hanoi. What is the "frontier of hatred"?

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## INFER

Pause at line 22. Who is the speaker of the poem? Who is the speaker addressing as "Brother"?

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## WORD STUDY

**Imagery** is language that appeals to the senses. Underline words and phrases in lines 23–46 that help you see, hear, feel, or taste how the speaker remembers village life. Circle the **verbs** that tell you what the villagers are doing.

## FLUENCY

Read the boxed passage aloud twice. The first time, decide how you will read the short lines and how you will convey basic meaning. The second time, give emphasis to the words that will help improve your interpretation of the lines.

## INFER

Why does the speaker wonder if the village life he remembers has changed (lines 47–49)?

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- 20 to the neighboring towns?  
To Bac-ninh, Cam-giang, Yen-bai,<sup>4</sup>  
the small villages, islands  
of brown thatch in a lush green sea?

- 25 The girls  
bright eyes  
ruddy cheeks  
four-piece dresses  
raven-bill scarves  
sowing harvesting  
30 spinning weaving  
all year round,  
the boys  
plowing  
transplanting  
in the fields  
35 in their shops  
running across  
the meadow at evening  
to fly kites  
and sing alternating songs.

- 40 Stainless blue sky,  
jubilant voices of children  
stumbling through the alphabet,  
village graybeards strolling to the  
temple,  
grandmothers basking in the twilight sun,  
45 chewing betel leaves  
while the children run—

4. **Bac-ninh** (băk'nin'), **Cam-giang** (kăm'gyăŋ'), **Yen-bai** (yên'bī'): towns near Hanoi.

Brother,  
 how is all that now?  
 Or is it obsolete?  
 50 Are you like me,  
 reliving the past,  
 imagining the future?  
 Do you count me as a friend  
 or am I the enemy in your eyes?  
 55 Brother, I am afraid  
 that one day I'll be with the March-North Army  
 meeting you on your way to the South.  
 I might be the one to shoot you then  
 or you me  
 60 but please  
 not with hatred.  
 For don't you remember how it was,  
 you and I in school together,  
 plotting our lives together?  
 65 Those roots go deep!  
  
 Brother, we are men,  
 conscious of more  
 than material needs.  
 How can this happen to us  
 70 my friend  
 my foe?

### CONFLICT

Re-read lines 53–57. What is the conflict between the speaker and the person addressed as “Brother”?

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### THEME

Underline the speaker's fear in lines 58–59. What **theme** does this fear reveal? How is it similar to a theme from “The Sniper”?

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### THEME

The speaker reminds Brother of their long friendship and of their values. What message about life do you think he is giving to Brother and to readers?

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